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Occam's Razor Applied to Occupational Therapy Language

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Occam's razor, named after William of Ockham who was an English philosopher from the early 1300s, is the rule of parsimony in which the simplest form of an entity is used. William of Ockham states the principle of economy as "Frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora," which translated means "It is futile to do with more things that which can be done with fewer" (Kneale & Kneale, 1962, p. 243). Occam's proverbial razor has become a common part of the cultural vernacular. Although the principle was intended to be applied to scientific theoretical postulates from which the most clear and concise form of the theory is preferred so that it can be tested, it can also be applied to scientific language. The use of language that is clear and concise is the basis for the efficient and effective communication of ideas.

The manuscripts submitted to the *Open Journal of Occupational Therapy* (OJOT) are carefully edited so that ideas are presented clearly and concisely. Occam's razor is applied to both the language that is used in general and also to specific occupational therapy terms.

Language in General

OJOT is edited to avoid the use of terms that complicate communication and that are often misused. Some examples of those commonly misused terms are explained below.

- Utilize versus use: The verb *utilize* means to use an object in a way for which it was not intended. For example, a person may utilize a knife to adjust a screw because a screwdriver is not available. Utilize also means to consume services, such as health care utilization. Unless the author needs the term utilize for one of the aforementioned meanings, the editors of OJOT prefer the more simple, concise, and accurate term *use*.
- Upon versus on: While upon and on can most often be used interchangeably, the editors of OJOT chose to use the more concise preposition *on* unless the term upon is required. For example, *upon* is typically used to describe when something occurs, such as "upon entering the room."
- Within versus in: Another set of prepositions that get confused are in and within. *In* is the preferred preposition because it is more concise, but *within* should be used if the author needs to indicate something that is inside the boundaries or limits of something; for example, "within a timeframe of 48 hr" or in statistical terms, within the group.
- Entitled versus titled: The terms entitled and titled also get frequently confused. The term *title* means to give a name to something such as an author giving a name or title to a manuscript. The term *entitled* can mean the same thing, but it also means that the person has a right to something. Given the fact that entitled has this dual meaning and is more cumbersome than titled, the editors of OJOT prefer the term titled.

Language Specific to Occupational Therapy

There has been some debate in the profession over the use of the term occupation as part of the label for several concepts. For example, Nelson (1996) used the terms occupational form, occupational performance, occupational synthesis, occupational assessment, occupational adaptation, and occupational compensation in one article with definitions for each term. The purpose of the article was to define therapeutic occupation and to provide clarity. The repeated use of a label occupation, however, can be cumbersome and interfere with clear definitions, thus creating confusion for the reader.

The terms occupational justice and social justice have also been debated (Kautzmann, 2009). While some voices from the profession cited Kautzmann's 2009 article defended the need for the

additional term, Dr. Jim Hinojosa, a founding member of the OJOT advisory board, and Dr. Ben Atchison, Managing Editor of OJOT, both stated that the addition of the term occupational justice to the vernacular was redundant and did not add a distinct construct to the term social justice. The editors of OJOT prefer that terms are made more succinct and not complicated by the addition of more labels unless absolutely necessary to provide clarity and distinction.

More recently, the term occupational therapy practitioner has gained favor in the occupational therapy language with the justification that this title is inclusive of occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020). The title occupational therapists, however, includes all individuals who have been educated in the use of occupation as a means of intervention to achieve occupational participation as the desired treatment outcome. Because the term includes all individuals who work in occupational therapy practice, education, or research, it is an inclusive term that does not exclude anyone based on their role in the occupational therapy profession.

The addition of the term occupational therapy practitioner and its subsequent abbreviation, OTP, may lead to confusion regarding the degree associated with that title. While occupational therapists hold various degrees that are abbreviated, such as certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA), occupational therapist registered (OTR), master's in occupational therapy (MOT), and occupational therapy doctorate (OTD), there is not an official degree granted for the term occupational therapy practitioner (OTP). Other professions, such as nursing, have an advanced degree that includes the term practitioner. A nurse practitioner has an advanced degree and the abbreviation NP is commonly known and used. In addition, occupational therapists are not licensed as occupational therapy practitioners, but as occupational therapists. Without a license, anyone could deem themselves to be an occupational therapy practitioner, but a license is required to practice as an occupational therapist. Because the use of the abbreviation OTP may create confusion about what degree is associated with the term occupational therapy practitioner; especially for readers from other countries in which such a term is unknown, the OJOT editors prefer the term occupational therapists which is more clear, concise, and inclusive.

Conclusion

Professional communication done through writing for publication requires precision. Ideas can be misconstrued and confused when accurate terms are not used. The most efficient way to foster communication is to use clear and concise language that does not complicate the intent or meaning of the words. The idea of Occam's razor, in which the most simple form is used, can foster communication with our fellow occupational therapists, as well as with other professions, throughout the globe. The editors of OJOT, an international occupational therapy journal, encourage the examination of our language with mindfulness toward precise and clear communication.

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